

A call for peacemaking: A perspective from the Sermon on the Mount



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Dates:

Received: 07 Dec. 2020

Accepted: 16 Mar. 2021

Published: 17 May 2021

How to cite this article:

Viljoen, F.P., 2021, 'A call for peacemaking: A perspective from the Sermon on the Mount', *In die Skriflig* 55(2), a2708. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v55i2.2708>

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In a country burdened by violence and intolerance where many citizens claim to be Christians, a call to respond to a Christian ethics of peacemaking is appropriate. This article explores the instruction of the Matthean Jesus that his followers should be peacemakers amidst their exposure to violence. The point of departure is taken from the seventh beatitude 'blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God' (Mt 5:9). The motif of peacemaking is followed through in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and then contextualised within the broader Matthean narrative. In the article the strenuous environment is considered in which the Gospel was written and the frequent occurrence of resistance, antagonism, violence and strife in the narrative. Instead of the endless and escalating chain of violence spawning yet more violence, Jesus breaks this chain. He instructs his disciples to be peacemakers. Peace starts with peace with God but ripples out to peace in families and among neighbours, until it comes to the most difficult part, peace with enemies.

Contribution: Based on this investigation, the article offers pastoral guidelines for Christians on how they ought to deal with a violent and intolerant environment.

Keywords: peacemaking; peace; Sermon on the Mount; Matthean Gospel; violence; resistance, antagonism; pastoral guidelines; beatitude.

Introduction¹

South Africa is widely regarded as one of the most violent countries in the world. As seen on many occasions, violence generates counter-violence. The violence in the country is associated with socio-political conflicts, civil unrest and racial polarisation, among other things. It seems that for many, violence has become the weapon of choice. They have little concern about the devastating interpersonal, social and economic consequences. In such an environment, society should, at all cost, try to avoid a situation where this abnormal situation becomes normal. Something should be done urgently (cf. Van Wyk 2005:355).

In a country where many citizens claim to be Christians, it is appropriate to call for a Christian ethics of peacemaking as a response to violence. This article provides a perspective on the Christian's call to peacemaking from the Sermon on the Mount. The selection of this perspective is based on two things. Violence and rejection form a continuous motif in the first Gospel (MacArthur 1985:xii), and the evangelist provides pointed teachings on how to respond to these problems. The Sermon on the Mount can be regarded as the Constitution of the kingdom of heaven. In it the Matthean Jesus gives instructions for the distinctive conduct befitting citizens of this kingdom, his followers (Van der Walt 2006:186; Viljoen 2013a:2). He alludes to the violence and rejections that his disciples will suffer, the brokenness of his followers, and how they should conduct themselves in such an environment. The foundation of this article comes from the seventh beatitude: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God' (Mt 5:9), and this is developed based on further instructions in the Sermon on the Mount related to peacemaking.

The article begins with a brief investigation of the strenuous socio-historical context of the first Gospel, followed by an overview of the occurrence of violence in this Gospel. These lead to an exegetical study of Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the Mount on making peace. The attention then briefly turns to the rest of Matthew, to demonstrate how Jesus' instruction to make peace is strengthened and expanded in the broader narrative. Based on the findings of this investigation, some guidelines are formulated for Christians on how they should conduct themselves in South Africa amidst suffering as a result of violence.

1. This article is dedicated to our emeritus colleague, Gert Breed, in appreciation of his contribution to pastoral theology as a minister in the Reformed Churches in Southern Africa and as a professor of Practical Theology.

Strenuous socio-historical context of the Matthean Gospel

The first Gospel partially reflects the strenuous political and religious environment in which the document originated (Viljoen 2016a:4–7).² At times the relationships between the different Judaist groups turned vicious (Brown 1997:78; Harlow 2012:391).³ The Pharisees seemed to have been the most dominant group during the time of Jesus' public ministry.⁴ This explains the many confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees in the Gospels. The picture that the first Gospel paints, was probably influenced by the post-70 CE conflicts between Christians and the emerging rabbinic teachers (who were closely related to the Pharisees), but it most likely also reflects a historical conflict in Jesus' lifetime (Brown 1997:79). The Jewish revolt of 66–70 CE and the destruction of the temple changed the dynamics between the Jewish religious groups. A need developed for a new religio-cultural formation (Saldarini 1994:13; Van Aarde 2011:48; Viljoen 2013a:s). This started a process of self-definition and consolidation of the fragmented society. Competing Jewish groups tried to gain prominence. A noteworthy part of the collective self-definition of the rabbinic movement was the adoption of measures to expel those who did not adhere to their value system. Such a procedure is described in the *Birkat ha-Minim*, a 'Blessing on the heretics' (actually a curse). It went through a process of development and was probably only completed by the beginning of the second century:

For apostates let there be no hope.
The dominion of arrogance do thou speedily root out in our days.
And let the Nazareans and the Minim perish in a moment.
Let them be blotted out of the book of the living.
And let them not be written with the righteous.

This 'blessing' denounced all movements that the rabbinic movement considered heretical. It seems that in later years this 'blessing' was specifically aimed at Christians (Brown 1997:82). The 'Jesus movement' (church) developed within these complex group dynamics (cf. Davies 1966:286; Viljoen 2016a:5–8; Wright 2013:311). The Christian community found itself in a position of increasing hostility and alienation from its Judaist roots (especially as in the rabbinic movement). The Matthean community formed part of this greater 'Jesus movement'.

Tension is quite prominent in the Matthean Gospel, reflecting a struggle to deal with this hostility. Matthew was writing

2.The setting of the Gospel or the community described in it, should be considered with great caution. The implied audience may not fully overlap with the historical audience. What is more, the internal evidence does not tell us whether we are dealing with, namely the views of the author, the addressees, or both.

3.1QpHab 11:2–8 describes how an unnamed high priest in the late second century BCE sought to kill the Essene Teacher of Righteousness on the Day of Atonement. Josephus describes how Alexander Jannaeus, early in the first century BCE, massacred 6 000 Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles because they challenged his ability to hold the priestly office (*Antiquitates Judaicae* 13.13.5; *Bellum Judaicum* 1.4.3).

4.Josephus (*Antiquitates Judaicae* 18.1.3; *Bellum Judaicum* 2.8.14) describes the Pharisees as the leading 'heresy', stating that they were extremely influential.

from the perspective of a Jew who had followed Jesus and who therefore experienced increasing tension with dominant Judaist groups. His community struggled to make sense of this alienation (Wilson 2004:51). Matthew's response to this hostility is evident from the Gospel's apologetics and polemics.

Conflict and violence in Matthew's narrative

Conflict and violence frequently occur in the first Gospel (Matthews & Gibson 2005:92; Viljoen 2018:1–2).

Jesus is physically tormented, verbally abused and badmouthed. Even before Jesus is born, his mother is in danger of being rejected by Joseph (Mt 1:19). Soon after Jesus is born, Herod threatens his life and Joseph must take Mary and the baby and flee to Egypt (Mt 2:1–15). Once Herod realises that he has been outwitted by the magi, he orders a gruesome infanticide (Mt 2:16–18). For the duration of his earthly ministry, Jesus has no place to lay his head (Mt 8:20). When he drives out demons, he is accused of doing this by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons (Mt 9:34; 12:24). After the Sabbath controversy between the Pharisees and Jesus (Mt 12:1–13), the Pharisees plot to kill Jesus (Mt 12:14). Jesus tells his disciples on several occasions that he will be betrayed, condemned, mocked, flogged, crucified and killed (Mt 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19; 26:45). During the Last Supper he predicts that one of his close disciples, Judas, would betray him (Mt 26:21). A large crowd, armed with swords and clubs, arrests Jesus (Mt 26:47). The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin look for false evidence against Jesus to put him to death. After Jesus is falsely accused, many false witnesses come to the fore (Mt 26:59–61). Scorners spit in his face and strike him with their fists. Others slap him and say: 'Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?' (Mt 26:67–68). When Judas, who has betrayed him, sees that Jesus has been condemned, he is seized by remorse and hangs himself (Mt 27:5).⁵ The governor's soldiers mock Jesus by stripping him, clothing him in a scarlet robe, putting a crown of thorns on his head and a staff in his hand, and kneeling in front of him (Mt 27:27–31). In Matthew's crucifixion scene (Mt 27:32–44), there is no reference to the penitent thief (as in Lk 23:40–43) or loved ones at the foot of the cross (other than in Jn 19:25–27), but only mockers and scorners. Women who followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs, only stand at a distance (Mt 27:55).

It is not only Jesus that suffers attacks. John the Baptist, Jesus' herald, is accused of having a demon (Mt 11:18). Later in the narrative he is jailed and despite the impression he made on Herod Antipas, he is eventually gruesomely beheaded (Mt 14:1–11). Jesus also warns his followers that they will be insulted, persecuted and falsely accused (Mt 5:10–12). They will have to endure physical violence such as being flogged, arrested, betrayed, hated, persecuted

5.Matthew is the only Gospel that reports Judas as hanging himself, although Acts 1:18 also refers to this event, though in a slightly different version.

and put to death and pursued (Mt 10:17–25). Some of those whom Jesus sends, will be killed and crucified, flogged and pursued (Mt 23:34).

The resistance and antagonism against Jesus and his followers involves even more than merely being the result of a violent society in general, for example the motif of the ‘brood of vipers’ (Mt 3:8–12) seems to involve a spiritual opposition to Jesus and his ministry, akin to Genesis 3. Some instances of antagonism against Jesus are portrayed as the fulfilment of Scripture (Mt 2:15, 17; 26:54–56).

Jesus urges his disciples to be peacemakers in the Sermon on the Mount

While confronted by all this violence, resistance and antagonism, the Matthean Jesus urges his followers not to take revenge or to respond with counter-violence (Matthews & Gibson 2005:97). Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is pertinent in this regard.

The Sermon on the Mount is fundamental to Jesus’ ethics teachings in Matthew (Viljoen 2016b:4–6). Jesus teaches his disciples how to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, in contrast to how people would normally live (Lioy 2004:117; Van der Walt 2006:186). In this Sermon Jesus repeatedly urges his followers to seek peace, beginning with the beatitudes.

The beatitudes (Mt 5:3–12) form the *exordium* to the Sermon on the Mount.⁶ These beatitudes introduce the moral instructions that follow in the rest of the Sermon (Luz 1990:215). They imply that when followers of Jesus adhere to the moral law as he teaches it, their lives will be filled with joy, purpose and eternal hope.

Several elements that occur later in the antitheses⁷ (Mt 5:21–47), are anticipated in the beatitudes, such as peacemakers (first and fifth antitheses) who will be called sons of God (Mt 5:9), be persecuted (fifth and sixth antitheses) for the sake of righteousness (Mt 5:10), suffer insults and false accusations (first, fifth and sixth antitheses) for the sake of Jesus (Mt 5:11), and receive a reward for perseverance (fifth and sixth antitheses) (Mt 5:12). These beatitudes speak of the opposition the addressees must endure, and how they untypically should respond to it (Van Aarde 1994:175).

Blessed are the peacemakers

In the seventh beatitude, Jesus makes a basic statement about peacemaking: ‘Μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, Ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ Θεοῦ κληθήσονται’ [Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be

6.The Sermon begins with a series of blessings (Mt 5:1–12) and ends with a series of warnings (Mt 7:1, 15, 21 and 26–27), similarly to the Book of the Law (Deuteronomium) (Domeris 1990:67).

7.Jesus’ ‘ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν’-statements are commonly labelled as ‘antitheses’. However, the grammar allows more nuances: ‘you have heard, but I (in contrast/in addition/in agreement) say to you’ (Davies & Allison 2004a:504; Viljoen 2013b:4–11).

called sons of God]⁸ (Mt 5:9). It seems as if Jesus here challenges the custom of those days. Social conditions in the first-century Palestine were such that people were inclined to respond with revolutionary violence to violence and oppression (Keener 1999:168). However, Jesus instructs the opposite.

This beatitude depicts peacemaking as a trait of God’s children. It should be noted that peacemakers are not merely peacekeepers. Jesus not only requires his followers to live in peace, but to actively seek to reconcile people who experience conflict and are hostile to each other. This beatitude reflects the *Sitz im Leben Jesu*, with the Matthean Jesus instructing his disciples on how to deal with hostility, but also the strenuous *Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche*, in which the Matthean community experienced adversity.

The beatitudes are followed by an exhortation where the metaphors of τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς (the salt of the earth – probably referring to the influence within one’s own community) and τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (the light of the world – probably referring to the influence outside one’s own community) are used to depict the distinctive life of Jesus’ followers (Mt 5:17–20). People become salt and light when they practise the principle Jesus teaches in the beatitudes. Jesus’ followers should make a positive contribution to the earth and the world. Regarding a violent community, they should work toward the establishing of a society where peace prevails.

After confirming his careful adherence to the Law (Mt 5:17–19),⁹ Jesus urges his followers that their δικαιοσύνη [righteousness] should exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 5:20). The righteousness that Jesus requires, transcends what the scribes and Pharisees of the narrative consider righteous (Viljoen 2013a:2).¹⁰ The way in which they react to conflict, must differ from what one would usually expect.

Antitheses to demonstrate peacemaking in practice

Jesus then proceeds with six antitheses in Matthew 5:21–47. Each of these antitheses is intended to illustrate what exceeding righteousness means in practice¹¹ (Carter 2000:143; Deines 2008:81; Osborne 2010:186; Spicq 2012:332; Viljoen 2013b:4–11). The first, fifth and sixth antitheses offer practical ways of making peace.

8.The translations from the Greek text in this article are based on those of the New International Version, although they are in some cases adapted for a more direct translation.

9.This densely formulated statement forms the first explicit announcement of Jesus concerning the law. It is pivotal to Matthew’s teaching of the law, not only in the Sermon on the Mount, but within the whole framework of his Gospel.

10.The required δικαιοσύνη is contrasted with the superficial righteousness of the Matthean scribes and Pharisees, which is criticised in Matthew 6:1 (Betz 1995:193).

11.Matthew 5:21–48 represents a *halakhic* form of debate with a series of six theses, each introduced by variant forms of ἐκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις (you have heard that it was said to/by the people long ago) (Mt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43), followed by variant forms of ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν (but I say to you)-statements (Mt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; Viljoen 2016b:7).

The first antithesis

In the first antithesis (Mt 5:21–26), Jesus warns his followers not to harbour anger: Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις Ὁὐ φονεύσεις· ὃς δ' ἂν φονεύσῃ, ἐνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει'. [You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be liable to judgement']. It seems that a common interpretation of the commandment was that a person would be fully adhering to it only if the person does not kill another physically. However, in his antithetical statement, Jesus emphatically states that the commandment goes much deeper than was commonly assumed: Ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν [but I say to you]. In contrast to the single thesis in Matthew 5:21, Jesus makes three antithetical statements in Matthew 5:22¹²:

Ἦς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἐνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει· ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ Ῥακά', ἐνοχος ἔσται τῷ συνεδρίῳ· ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ Ῥωρέ', ἐνοχος ἔσται εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός'. [Anyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca', will be liable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'Fool!' will be liable to the fire of hell]. (Mt 5:22)

Jesus goes beyond the act of physical murder. One not only should not kill, but also not want to kill. He warns against anger and hatred as they give rise to murder. Anger should be regarded as murder in mind (Osborne 2010:190). The statements develop from a general act of anger into two specific offences in parallel form.

After this threefold antithesis of what to avoid, Jesus gives two contrasting positive examples (Viljoen 2013b:5). One should not only avoid deadly deeds and words, but also positively work towards reconciliation.

The first example relates to internal and the second to external relationships (Osborne 2010:189). Regarding internal relationships, he urges his disciples to make sure they are reconciled with their brothers (and sisters) whenever they plan to offer a gift at the altar:

Ἄν οὖν προσφέρῃς τὸ δῶρόν σου ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον κάκει μνησθῆς ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἔχει τι κατὰ σοῦ, ἄφες ἐκεῖ τὸ δῶρόν σου ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ ὑπάγε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου, καὶ τότε ἔλθὼν πρόσφερε τὸ δῶρόν σου'. [If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift]. (Mt 5:23–24)

Believers should seek reconciliation and the restoration of relationships (Guelich 1982:190). Jesus argues that one cannot bring a sacrifice while one harbours unforgiving attitudes.¹³

In his second example, Jesus returns to the judicial setting, which probably refers to external relationships:

12. These three statements demonstrate Matthew's preference for using triadic structures.

13. The importance of brotherly or sisterly reconciliation above punctilious sacrifice, correlates with Jesus' consistent emphasis of love for one's neighbour and with the fifth clause of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:12), which links the forgiveness of others with the forgiveness of God (Davies & Allison 2004a:516).

Ἴσθι εὐνοῶν τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ σου ταχύ, ἕως ὅτου εἶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, μήποτε σε παραδῶ ὁ ἀντιδικός τῷ κριτῇ καὶ ὁ κριτὴς τῷ ὑπηρετῇ καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν βληθήσῃ· ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν, ἕως ἂν ἀποδῶς τὸν ἔσχατον κοδράντην [Settle matters quickly with your adversary while you are still with him on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out from there until you have paid the last kodranten]. (Mt 5:25–26)

Jesus therefore expands the negative and narrow meaning of the command 'not to murder' to include a positive call for reconciliation. While the first example mainly refers to close relationships, probably within one's own belief system, the second example refers to external relationships, even with unbelievers. Peacemaking clearly involves a commitment to restore all sorts of damaged relationships. Such actions represent a higher form of δικαιοσύνη [righteousness], which Jesus requires of his disciples (Mt 5:20). These exemplary demands express the basic attitudes Jesus asks of us.

Fifth antithesis

With the fifth antithesis (Mt 5:38–42), Jesus continues with the theme of peacemaking. He takes the ethics of non-retaliation to its extreme (Mt 5:38–47). He not only instructs his followers not to retaliate, but to do surprisingly more than their enemies would ask for: Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη Ὅφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ καὶ ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος [You have heard that it was said: 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth']. This condensed version of the *lex talionis*¹⁴ refers to three passages from the Pentateuch, namely Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. Jesus denounces any form of retaliation with the words ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ [Do not resist an evil person] (Mt 5:39a). Followers of Jesus must refuse to sink to the level of the aggressor by returning evil with evil (Viljoen 2013b:9–10). However, evil does not remain unopposed; it must be answered with good in a surprising manner (Osborne 2010:208).

Jesus follows the imperative not responding with violence, with three specific examples (Mt 5:39b–41) and a general principle of how one should respond instead:

Ἄλλ' ὅστις σε ραπίζει εἰς τὴν δεξιὰν σιαγόνα [σου], στρέψον αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην, καὶ τῷ θέλοντί σοι κριθῆναι καὶ τὸν χιτῶνά σου, λαβεῖν ἄφες αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον, καὶ ὅστις σε ἀγγαρεύσει μίλιον ἓν, ὑπάγε μετ' αὐτοῦ δύο. [If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, hand over your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles]. (Mt 5:42)

A slap on the right cheek by a right-handed person implies that the person would be hitting with the back of the hand, which was regarded as extra insulting, with the insult even worse than the pain.¹⁵ In the second example, Jesus instructs his followers to also offer one's garment when an opponent

14. This *lex talionis* was not intended to sanction revenge as such, but to prevent excesses of punishment.

15. According to the *Mishnah*, hitting with the back of one's hand carried a double fine (Baba Qamma 8:6).

claims one's tunic.¹⁶ The third example resembles the Roman practice of demanding transportation of goods from subordinates (Gundry 1994:94). In all three cases the absolute opposite of violent resistance is proposed (Luz 1990:328). It is important to note that this does not mean that unfair aggression remains unanswered, but that acts of aggression must be overcome with contrasting non-violent reactions (Foster 2004:125). Jesus concludes with a general principle: τῷ αἰτοῦντί σε δός, καὶ τὸν θέλοντα ἀπὸ σοῦ δανίσασθαι μὴ ἀποστραφῆς [give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you] (Mt 5:42). Jesus' followers should not only avoid retaliation but be surprisingly kind (Osborne 2010:206).

Clearly, these instructions cry out against the standard dehumanising spirals of force and violence that rule the world.¹⁷ It turns typical human behaviour on its head. Such challenging renunciation of force expresses the true meaning of love. Every reaction to the unfair use of force, must demonstrate that such force belongs to the unredeemed world, which desperately needs redemption.

This instruction poses another dimension of higher δικαιοσύνη [righteousness], that should distinguish Jesus' followers from their adversaries.

Sixth antithesis

The theme of higher δικαιοσύνη [righteousness] amidst animosity, is addressed in the final antithesis, picking up this topic from the final beatitude (Mt 5:11–12; Viljoen 2013b: 10–11). Jesus responds to two rulings: ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου [love your neighbour] and μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου [hate your enemy] (Mt 5:43). The first ruling refers to Leviticus 19:18, but the second has no direct parallel in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus is probably responding to popular views on love for one's neighbours, that in practice leads to a negative attitude towards enemies.¹⁸ Jesus emphatically instructs the alternative to the second ruling: ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν [love your enemies] and προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς [pray for those who persecute you] (Mt 5:44). He counters attitudes of hate towards one's enemy. The love commandment is not limited to one's neighbour but includes one's enemies and persecutors. Jesus combines love with prayer, which suggests an honest desire for the well-being of one's enemies.

Jesus offers two reasons for this instruction. The first reason is: ὅπως γένησθε υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς [that you may be sons of your Father in heaven]. This promise links with the seventh beatitude which promises that peacemakers

16.The cloak was more valuable and something that even the poorest had the right to keep (as it was used for their bedding as well), and it could not be taken away permanently (see Ex 22:26–27 and Dt 24:12–13; Osborne 2010:209).

17.These instructions have led some interpreters in history towards total pacifism, while others followed a moderate line (see Luz 2007:277–280). These exemplary instructions must be interpreted in terms of the reason for them, that is to break the spiral of violence and taking perspectives from the whole Gospel into consideration.

18.A negative attitude towards enemies appears in the Qumran Manual: 'They may love all the sons of light ... and hate all the sons of darkness' (1 QS 1:3–4, 9–10).

will be called sons of God (Mt 5:9). The blessings of God's kingdom are related to the instruction to love one's enemy (Piper 1979:173). God's sons (and daughters) are those who partake in the Father's character (McNeile 1980:71). Jesus refers to God's mercy as the reason why there should be no distinction between those to be loved, ὅτι τὸν ἥλιον αὐτοῦ ἀνατέλλει ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους [because He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous]. God grants his good gifts, the sunshine and the rain, to all, bad as well as good.

His children must show the same generosity. Plummer (1982 [1909]:89) fittingly remarks: 'To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine'.

Jesus proceeds to give the second reason for this instruction:

ἐὰν γὰρ ἀγαπήσητε τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας ὑμᾶς, τίνα μισθὸν ἔχετε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ τελῶνα τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν; καὶ ἐὰν ἀσπάσησθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν μόνον, τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε; οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ ἔθνηκοι τὸ αὐτὸ; [For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that]. (Mt 5:46–47)

These two questions reflect Jesus' requirement for greater righteousness (Mt 5:20). Greeting goes along with loving, as ἀσπάσησθε [you greet] stands parallel with ἀγαπήσητε [you love]. The Jews greet with 'shalom', which implies a prayer for the one being greeted.¹⁹

Matthew 5:48 concludes the series of six antitheses: Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν [be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect]. This call echoes Leviticus 19:2: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy', and Deuteronomy 18:13: 'You must be blameless (LXX: τέλειός) before the Lord your God'. This imperative links up with the call for greater righteousness in Matthew 5:20 and forms the culmination to the argument.²⁰ Being 'righteous' is paralleled with 'being perfect'. With these instructions, Jesus urges his disciples to uphold a higher form of ethics than what is the norm.

Prayer for God's kingdom

The Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9–15), which is included in the Sermon on the Mount, again picks up on the theme of peace. This prayer expresses a worldview and shapes the community that prays it (Carter 2000:169; Luz 2007:313).²¹ It recognises the brokenness of this world and seeks the manifestation of

19.In the ancient Jewish society, a person's social standing was linked to the type of greeting the person received (Osborne 2010:213). Jesus accuses the scribes and the Pharisees of the love of demonstrative greetings (Mt 23:7).

20.The opening δικαιοσύνη [righteousness] (Mt 5:20) and the closing τέλειός [perfect] (Mt 5:48) form an *inclusio* of the series of six antitheses emphasising Jesus' call for a higher ethic.

21.Tertullian regarded the Lord's prayer as a '*sermo Domini*', being a summary of the Christian message, and a '*commemoratio disciplinae*', being a basic ethics text. For Gregory of Nyssa (*De Oratione Dominica* 5.3) it provided 'guidance to the sublime life' (Luz 2007:313).

God's reign on earth: ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου [let your kingdom come]. It pleads that the earth would be a place where God's will is done as in heaven: Γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου, Ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς [let your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth]. While these petitions are eschatological in character, they also call for the reign of God in the world Christians are currently living in. They plead that God's divine plan executed in heaven, may prevail on earth too. These petitions include ethical dimensions.²² When praying them, the praying community not only asks God to do what he wants, but also asks to align themselves actively with the will of God. It recognises the link between being forgiven and the need to forgive others: Καὶ ἄφεσις ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, Ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν [and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors].²³ People who pray these words, seek reconciliation with their foes.²⁴ They mourn the reality of temptation and evil, and recognise that they themselves cannot overcome these: Καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν, Ἀλλὰ ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ [and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil].

Those who pray this, form the community of God's children²⁵ on earth. They are concerned about troubles and iniquities on earth. They plead for transformation of people's lives to conform to God's will. God's kingdom should come to expel evil so that peace can prevail.

Dealing with own attitudes

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also attends to the importance of dealing with one's own attitudes while striving towards peace. He warns that one should not look at the minor offence of one's brother,²⁶ while paying no attention to one's own faults: 'Τί δὲ βλέπεις τὸ κάρφος τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου, τὴν δὲ ἐν τῷ σῶϊ ὀφθαλμῷ δοκὸν οὐ κατανοεῖς'; ['but why do you look at the speck in the eye of your brother, but the plank in your eye you do not notice?'] (Mt 7:3). One should not judge others by a different standard that one uses to judge oneself (Witherington III 2006:154). This text calls for self-examination. As starting point to making peace, one should recognise one's own flaws and be willing to correct them, before criticising those of others.

A person with a plank in his or her eye is completely blind and can therefore make no honest judgement on the splinter in another's eye (Luz 2007:353). However, this does not imply that one should never criticise wrong behaviour.²⁷ There is

22. Prayer and human action are not mutually exclusive. 'Prayer is the active person's speaking with God' (Luz 2007:322).

23. The Lord's Prayer is followed by a 'logion' with the form of a two part 'mashal' (Mt 6:14–15), which corresponds with the petition on forgiveness in the prayer. With this statement the evangelist emphasises how important it is that Jesus' disciples should forgive their foes.

24. The relationship between being forgiven by God, and the responsibility to forgive others, is accentuated in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Mt 18:23–35).

25. The address 'our Father in heaven', connects the praying individual with a community that enjoys God's nearness and care.

26. Reference to 'brother', indicates that the text refers to relations within the religious community.

27. This is clear also from other short narratives about Jesus in the Gospel (e.g. Mt 7:15–20; 10:11–15; 18:17–18), particularly Jesus' critique of Pharisees and

place for correction and reproof of others, but only after a person has dealt with his or her own mistakes. Jesus states 'ἐκβαλε πρῶτον ἐκ τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ σοῦ τὴν δοκόν, καὶ τότε διαβλέψεις ἐκβαλεῖν τὸ κάρφος ἐκ τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου' [first cast out the plank from your eye, and then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter from your brother's eye] (Mt 7:5). Such an approach would put the, often exaggerated, offences of one's foes into perspective. Sande (1997:11) aptly remarks that overlooking the minor offences of others, while honestly dealing with one's own shortcomings, often leads to sincere dialogue, healing and reconciliation.

Instructions to make peace in the broader Matthean context

Turning to the rest of Matthew, Jesus' instruction to make peace is strengthened and expanded in the broader narrative. The following examples substantiate this view.

Jesus heals and restores broken relationships, and rejects the chain of violence

The Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7) and Matthew's narrative on Jesus' healing miracles (Mt 8–9)²⁸ are compositionally framed by two summaries of the healing miracles Jesus performed as part of the coming of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 4:23–25 and 9:35). This series of miracles demonstrates Jesus' ability to perform amazing healing (Riches & Sim 2005:139). In the ancient Mediterranean world, healing involved more than physical healing from a disease. Sick people were isolated and even expelled²⁹ from the society, but when healed, their total well-being was restored (Pilch 1988:60–66; Viljoen 2014a:4). While the sick person was socially disvalued and excluded from society, a healed person could again fully participate in societal activities. In the healing narratives, Jesus is described as a compassionate healer who restores life and relationships. His healings form part of the coming of the kingdom of heaven, where eventually no sickness and broken relationships will persist.

In Matthew 9:9–13, Jesus shows mercy to despised and marginalised figures (Viljoen 2014b:218–222). He forgives sins and heals the 'sick' in order to restore broken relationships. His table fellowship and feasting with tax collectors and sinners symbolises closeness with people who are usually excluded from social activities (Blomberg 2005:15; Hagner 1993:238). Jesus instructs the Pharisees, who pride themselves on their knowledge of Scripture while criticising Jesus for doing so, to go and learn what Hosea 6:6 means where it states that God desires mercy and not sacrifice. Jesus' healing activity defines the meaning of mercy. It implies acceptance of foes and the healing of disturbed

other Jewish leaders (e.g. Mt 16:6–12; 23:1–39). One needs to use moral insight to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, but this should not be done in a hypocritical and haughty manner.

28. Matthew 8–9 forms this block of 9 or 10 healing miracles (depending whether one reads the healing of the woman with haemorrhage and raising of the ruler's daughter as two separate healings) separated by two discipleship sections (Mt 8:18–22; 9:9–17).

29. This was especially the case with contagious diseases, and what the ancients regarded as leprosy.

relationships in a society. Jesus' disciples should know the Scriptures and follow him in restoring broken relationships.

In Gethsemane Jesus rejects the option of violence when he instructs his companion to put back his sword (Mt 26:51–52). Instead of the endless and escalating chain of violence, spawning yet more violence, Jesus breaks this chain. His power does not depend on a sword. In Matthew 5:39–42 he teaches non-violence, and in Matthew 26:51–52 he demonstrates it. He could have called on his Father for 12 legions of angels, showing that he doesn't need to rely on his unprepared disciples.

Wrongdoing must be corrected

However, this does not mean that peacemaking never requires constructive confrontation (Sande 1997:11). A few examples from the first Gospel illustrates this point.

Jesus sharply corrects Peter, who rebuked Jesus when he predicted his own death (Mt 16:23). He warns Peter that he serves as Satan's tool by hindering God's plan.

Matthew 18:15–17 provides a community code for a situation where a community member sins against a fellow member (Viljoen 2009:656–659). The objective of confrontation is defined. It is not to take revenge, but to restore broken relationships. Such confrontation must be done in an amicable manner. This confrontation is primarily for the benefit of the one who did wrong, although it also eases the pain of the offended party.

Matthew furthermore frequently narrates controversies between Jewish leaders and Jesus. Jesus, for example opposes the Pharisees' objection to him associating with taxpayers and sinners (Mt 9:12), of his disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath (Mt 12:3–8), and not ritually washing their hands before eating (Mt 15:3–13).

The climax of Jesus' accusation of the Pharisees, is found in the Woe Discourse (Mt 23; Viljoen 2018:2–7).

This discourse concludes a narrative in which religious leaders are in constant confrontation with Jesus. In these controversies, the hypocrisy and unrighteousness of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, who put themselves on a legal and moral high ground, are exposed. Jesus counters them by setting out the antithetical self-sacrificing behaviour he wants from his followers (e.g. Mt 23:8–12; Davies & Allison 2004b:265; Wiefel 1998:397).

Peacemaking is grounded in peace with God

Matthew teaches that peacemaking has a horizontal, but also a vertical dimension. Peacemaking starts with peace with God, as he is the source of peace.

Jesus extends a welcome *‘δεῦτε πρὸς με’* [come to me] to *‘πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι’* [all those who are

wearied and burdened]. He grants grace to those who are like little ones and who are meek, but who suffer due to a lack of peace. With him one can find peace, or more specifically, *‘ἀνάπαυσις ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν’* [rest for your souls] (Mt 11:28–29; Viljoen 2014b:226). Jesus acts as saviour. His ministry of mercy and healing brings rest and peace with God.

Jesus' disciples who experience this peace, should follow in his steps and follow through by endeavouring to make peace in their societies.

Some pastoral guidelines for Christian communities

Based on this investigation, some guidelines can be formulated for Christian communities suffering, due to conflict, violence and a lack of peace.

Matthew's Jesus clearly recognises the reality of the conflict and violence that his followers will suffer, and frequently warns them about it. In such an environment, one of their distinctive identity traits should lie in the fact that they are peacemakers. By actively seeking peace, God will bless them, and they will be recognised as 'children of God'. However, in working towards peace, they must expect to experience all sorts of resistance.

Being a peacemaker begins with having peace with God. In their ordinary state, people are wearied and burdened due to guilt and broken relationships with God and with fellow humans. Jesus invites wearied people to come to him. He relieves their burden and establishes a new community of citizens of the kingdom of heaven and children of God. He heals and restores relationships, both between humans and God, and among humans.

Jesus' saving activity does not cancel out the peacemaking responsibility of those whom he heals. Those who have been granted peace with God, are called to make peace. They must do this in their own communities, but also when it comes to the most difficult part, namely to make peace with enemies. They are involved in the arrival of the kingdom of God, which manifests itself in God's unlimited love for people. This in turn, making it possible for citizens of the kingdom to love their enemies. As salt of the earth, they are called to purify and spread a pleasant taste. As light of the world, they must expel the darkness of evil. Obeying the will of God, their practices of righteousness distinguish them from those who live a superficial religious life. They do not only avoid deeds, words or thoughts of murder, but actively seek reconciliation. They not only refrain from taking revenge but respond to evil in a manner that represses violence. They act surprisingly atypical by showing love, even towards their enemies.

Their prayers lament the brokenness of this world. As community of God's children, they commit themselves to seeking the manifestation of God's reign. While gratefully

accepting that they are forgiven by God, they forgive those who trespass against them. They do serious self-examination to recognise their own guilt in disturbed relationships and actively attempt to set issues right.

However, this does not mean that peacemaking excludes constructive confrontation, but when they confront others, believers should intentionally seek to restore broken relationships.

From this investigation, it seems that Matthew's narrative of the ministry of Jesus, the humble King, provides important pastoral perspectives on a faith community struggling to come to terms with a violent society.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

F.P.V. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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